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## TRAINING CHILDREN TO A WISE USE OF THEIR LEISURE

BY J. GEORGE BECHT, SC.D.,

Executive Secretary of the Pennsylvania State Board of Education.

If every home were completely organized; if it could supply books, pictures, music and play activities suited to the different periods of a child's development, the proper employment of the leisure hours of children would present a less difficult problem than it now does. If parents knew how to interpret the characteristic activities of children and had a fuller sympathy with youth and a deeper insight into their hopes, desires and ambitions, their joys and sorrows; and if they could give friendly counsel and advice without nagging, there would be fewer domestic tragedies growing out of the misunderstandings between parents and children.

If teachers were wise to the significance of the playtime of life, and could fathom the meaning of childhood's longings and the tremendous forces that struggle for expression, especially during the adolescent period of life, there would be fewer occasions of disregard for the constituted authority of the school.

If the community could be made to realize in a vital way that as a community it has a responsibility in providing opportunities for the legitimate expression of the nervous energy of children, there would be little need for curfew laws; and disorderly conduct on the part of the youth in town and city would be an infrequent occurrence.

The playtime of the child is not only a preparation for subsequent life but it constitutes a real life experience. "We do not play because we are young," says Goos, "but we are young that we may play and thus receive the inheritance that comes to us through that channel." Plato said: "the plays of children have the mightiest influence on the maintenance of laws," and Schiller observed, "that man is man only when he plays." Froebel declared:

Play is the highest phase of child development and the most spiritual activity of man at this stage and at the same time typical of human life as a whole—of the inner hidden natural life in man and all things.

A child that plays thoroughly will be a thoroughly determined man, capable of sacrifice for the promotion of the welfare of himself and others. The spontaneous play of the child discloses the life of the man. Injure the child at this period and you may mar his life.

We are becoming more and more conscious of the fact in our modern civilization that life is a unity; that though there may be "seven ages" of man, these periods are not sharply defined, separate existences but all tend toward and merge into a complete and unified whole. Time was when school life, home life and community life were considered as separate activities. At that time life was ranged on simple lines. Then the school gave itself over to the problem of making children literate; the home furnished endless opportunities in useful vocational activities for the constructive and inventive genius of the children. Community life was isolated and individual.

But today the relationships of these once apparently separate institutions are better understood and their significance as bearing on the whole life problem is being closely noted. "Work-play-study" is the motto of the modern school, as "shorter hours of work and time for leisure" is increasingly the cry in the business and labor world. Modern invention and scientific discoveries have made of civilization a vast complex structure and to meet the needs of this, readjustment of educational procedure is demanded. It is probable that on the whole our philosophy of life and our philosophy of education have changed relatively little, but too frequently we have sacrificed the end and the purpose of life for the means. It is a false philosophy of life that would keep us ever getting ready to live without enjoying life in the process of getting ready. The laboring man, who spends twelve hours in hard and unrelenting toil and at the close of the day is so fatigued that relief comes only from spending the other twelve in sleep, may make a good living for himself and family but it can scarcely be said that he has any appreciation for what Browning calls, "the wild joy of living." The great need in American life today is a proper balance of work and leisure; and that leisure so employed that it will minister to a continued growth of character.

It has been well said that the great waste of ill-spent leisure consists not solely in the vice that ensues; it lies more in the virtue that was not developed. That a young man should become de-

graded by spending his leisure in miscellaneous vices, thus ruining body and soul, is only half of the disaster. The other side of it is that the wasted hours might have been enjoyably spent in ways that would have led to a profitable vocation and made of him a valuable member of the community.

The agencies through which children may be trained to a wise use of their leisure are the home, the school, the church and the community.

### THE HOME

"It matters little," said a great thinker, "what a people cares for second or third so long as it cares for its home first." In all the changes and moving currents of institutional life, none has held so permanent a place in our thought as the home. Yet notwithstanding this there has been a shifting of responsibility, due to social and industrial causes. Many of the activities in the home which offered opportunities for proper use of leisure time have passed over into other industrial and social agencies.

The glamour of the city street has cast its spell over the youth of our day to such an extent, that the home is in danger of losing its rank as first among our civilizing agencies.

Jane Addams, in her book *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*, utters a severe indictment against modern civilization for its neglect of the youth who are exposed to all the allurements, and danger and evils of life in the city streets. These changes in the social order constitute a call to the realization of increased responsibility on the part of the parents to establish within the home direct agencies for the maintenance of social ideals.

Many children do not use the leisure hours in the home wisely because the home offers so few comforts. "Why" asks one, "do children go out on the streets at night"? and the answer too often must be, because the home is so unattractive. Thousands of children live in homes wholly unsuited to ordinary living purposes. These children have no places in the home to which they can invite their young friends. There is no provision made for employing leisure hours in legitimate pleasures. When one thinks of the crowded tenements, the unsightly and inhospitable looking rows of houses with their meager equipment; the bare floors and pictureless walls; with nothing to awaken or encourage the esthetic sense or

satisfy the ordinary wants of childhood, we are not surprised that children get into the habit of being constantly upon the street.

A home library may be made one of the most attractive means for properly and purposefully employing some of the child's leisure hours. A small bookcase and a few well selected books within range of the child's experiences can be made the starting point. It is important in this connection to have the ownership of books and library equipment, however meager it may be, vested in the child. Books should have the name of the child inscribed, or better still, a book plate, the design of which reflects his choice and taste, should be pasted in the book. There is a pride in the permanency of possession which such a plan gives which may be most appropriately stimulated. To bring growing boys and girls into vital relation with good books and reading matter is a fine art and one to which parents and teachers may lend themselves with the assurance that such training adds materially to the sum total of human life and human happiness.

The public library, as a means of giving employment and profit in leisure hours to children as well as adults, is universally discussed, but unfortunately its worth and influence is not universally appreciated. One-half of the children leave school at the age of 12. If their education is not to stop there, the library is the chief instrumentality for its continuance; and for its proper use, the school and the home need to give training. The library habit will be a means of development all through life. It was Lowell who said that the foundation of his literary life was laid in his father's library.

Matthew Arnold said on one of his lecture tours in this country, that nothing he saw in America impressed him so much as the sight of a ragged and almost shoeless little boy sitting in the reading room of our public libraries studying his book with all the sangfroid of a member of a West End London Club.

The library habit or the reading habit is not only a pleasant way of using leisure, but properly guided is most uplifting.

### THE SCHOOL

Increasingly the school is becoming conscious of the responsibility placed upon it in this respect. The significant breaks in the formal school program, as indicated in the administration of many school systems, are hopeful signs. From the kindergarten to the

university, play is coming to be recognized as one of the most important socializing factors. But it is not alone on the physical side that the school is furnishing opportunities for the right use of leisure. It is organizing within the system a group of collateral activities that call into play musical, literary and other social, restful and recreative forces. The desire for amusement is a most natural one and youth needs only opportunity and direction in the employment of its creative genius. Musically inclined pupils should be organized into an orchestra; those having dramatic tendencies may engage in amateur theatricals; those having literary or forensic abilities should be encouraged to form debating clubs. Pupils mechanically disposed will be interested in reading such magazines as *Popular Mechanics* or the *Popular Science Monthly* and will take keen delight in reproducing in the school or home the mechanisms described. Science clubs for those who may be interested in botany, zoology or geology and other sciences should be organized. The one great supreme and commanding need to secure results is intelligent, broad-minded, leadership.

No phase of the educational problem has received more attention during recent years than that involving the physical activities of children. The multiplication of playgrounds and gymnasiums is evidence of the fact that this thought is getting a firm hold upon the urban as well as suburban communities. Public playgrounds are being provided and school buildings are being erected on plots sufficiently large to insure proper recreational facilities. Below the grammar school, the games are varied and play is spontaneously diversified. It is very gravely questioned, however, whether beyond the grammar school period plays and games are organized so as to train the masses of young people to engage their leisure hours in these recreational activities. High school athletics are narrowly and intensively organized. The game is a public, spectacular affair in which the team, a small group of especially trained persons, represents the mass of observers. The latter watch and applaud. That such occasional exhibitions afford opportunities for mass enthusiasm and the expression of a fine spirit cannot be denied. Some leisure can be profitably spent in this way. But to give one's self over wholly to watching the game or games and having no part in recreational activities, tends to an unwise use of hours that could be made to give profit as well as pleasure. There is

great danger that the high school and the college will professionalize athletics by highly specializing the activities. We have much to learn from the Germans in this respect. Instead of having a few different kinds of ball games, they have four score. These give a wide range of opportunity for almost every degree of ability. Our need in this direction is to awaken the interest of the individual so that he shall take part in these varying phases of play.

### THE CHURCH

Unfortunately, the church up to the present time has had very little in the way of organization to provide for the leisure of either children or adults. The institutional church which came into existence some years ago has not realized the hopes of its founders. Though the idea was well conceived and the basis of its organization is fundamentally sound, it does not seem to have made much progress. This is due most probably to the fact that in populous centers there are so many counter attractions, such as moving picture shows, theatres, dance halls and public parks, that the church has not been able to offer a social program sufficiently strong to counteract these influences and thus have a share in shaping the leisure life of the community. But the decadent condition of the rural church cannot be ascribed to the same reason, for here there is a lack of social and recreational opportunities. Rural church surveys indicate that "the trouble with the church in the past has been that it has been ministering to itself, seeking to run a gospel ark for its own members, without feeling that it owed any duty of service to the community as a whole." This attitude is largely responsible for the lifeless condition of so many of these churches. Recent studies show that those churches that are organizing the social life of the community are growing while those content to follow only the old lines of activity are rapidly losing ground. In a survey of 76 churches in one county of Indiana, it was found that among those that were organizing the social and recreational life, 65 per cent were found to be growing in membership while of those that were not organizing the social and recreational life, only 12 per cent were found to be growing. Of two hundred and fifty-six churches found in other parts of the state where no attention was paid to the recreational life, in only one was there found any evidence of growth. The lesson seems to be plainly written: The church that would

flourish must adjust itself to this new demand and provide opportunities to satisfy the instincts and longings for social companionship. Some notable instances are on record where this has been done. Curtis in his *Play and Recreation* describes what was done in an Illinois country community:

Twelve years ago a young pastor came fresh from the Seminary to a dying country church. He first organized a singing school, which brought the young people into the church one night a week to sing. It soon developed that there were several good voices and out of this singing grew a boys' quartet, several soloists and a good chorus for the church. After this, a gospel chorus was organized which met around at the houses of the members. A considerable part of each of these evenings was given to sociability and the program became very popular with the young people. Sociables were planned where light refreshments were served. These developed a spirit of good comradeship among the people. Out of the spirit grew a missionary circle for the girls, and an athletic club for the boys, an annual home coming and picnic and a series of extension lectures and entertainments. In the twelve years of his pastorate, a ten thousand dollar church had been completed and paid for, the pastor's salary had been raised 40 per cent and in the last five years more than six thousand dollars had been given to outside benevolences. Practically everyone in the country-side is a member of the church. Though located not far from three large cities, none of its young people have left the farms to seek city life. During the entire pastorate only one young person in the neighborhood is known to have gone wrong.

Under wise and proper leadership, it is not difficult to organize appropriate social activities for the leisure hours of the young people. In many places the boys' classes have been organized into boy scout patrols, hunting-with-camera-clubs, baseball and basketball clubs and nature study hikes. Girls' classes have taken up definite practical projects in connection with missionary work. In all these recreational activities the important consideration is a definite and well-defined program. The church and the Sunday school can ill afford to miss the opportunity to give serious consideration to the development of leadership among its members so that the force and energy of its young people may be directed to wise, useful, social ends.

#### THE COMMUNITY

"No Christian and civilized community can afford to show a happy-go-lucky lack of concern for the youth of today," declared Theodore Roosevelt recently, "for, if so, that community will have to pay a terrible penalty of financial and social degradation in the tomorrow."

The community playground, the social center, the properly supervised municipal dance hall, May-day fetes, and historical pageants are among the recently noted community movements tending toward a better appreciation of how to employ the leisure and activities of children as well as adults. The dramatic instinct which is such a marked characteristic of youth is being increasingly utilized in providing isolated communities with instructive as well as entertaining performances. It is not only in the cities and towns but in the distinctively rural communities that such activities may be carried on. Recently in an interior township of Pennsylvania the entire community manifested its interest in a May-day festival. In it were united features that were both social and educational. Thirty floats, some representing distinctive May-day allusions, others symbolizing historical, industrial and educational events, passed over the principal highways to a central meeting place where luncheon was served and a program of exercises, consisting of choruses by the children, folk dances, Boy Scout drills and an exhibition by the Camp Fire Girls was carried out.

During the past year there has been a revival of the old time "singing school" idea which has been adapted to new conditions. The activity is organized under the name of "community singing." Old and young are invited to take part. One night is devoted to old familiar songs, another to patriotic singing; still another to singing songs written by local talent. The history of the songs, the purpose for which they were written and incidental interesting facts relating to them are briefly described by the leader. But the main purpose is to have every one take part in the singing. Such an exercise has both a stimulating and a unifying effect.

Among the most pronounced changes in American life are those noted in connection with vocational and avocational experiences. As wealth accumulates and economic pressure grows less, leisure assumes a larger place in the social process. If leisure time is not wisely used it becomes a menace to society, breeding debauchery and crime. For the home, the church, the school and the community there lies in this direction an unparalleled opportunity to promote the happiness and general welfare of "all the children of all the people."